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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND RACISM

THE RACIAL POINT OF VIEW IS FOREIGN TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The very principles of Christianity were, from the outset, a denial of race prejudice. Moreover, Christianity came into being and first spread in the Graeco-Roman world and within the Roman Empire, which included a variety of races and, as the modern Nordic race theorists have said time and again, professed no race doctrine. The Empire of Augustus, the Pax Romana, the Orbis Romanus were all fundamentally aracial. The Stoic philosophy, in which the Latins found an ideal which made a natural appeal to them, proclaimed the unity of mankind and the principles of equality and brotherhood among men. The Church thus remained untouched by race prejudice. The Fathers of the Church loved to emphasize this miracle of Christian unity, which embraced so many different men and peoples. "He who is in Rome knows that the Indians are very members of the same body. What society can be compared with this? And all have one Head, which is Christ . . . ."[1]

When, through the conversion of monarchs and their peoples, Christianity developed into a political and legal "Christian Republic" as well as a spiritual Church, when the spiritual authority acquired the means of influencing

1 St. Augustine, Migne P.L. 62, 2946

society, the opposition of Christians towards other groups - heretics or infidels - often resulted in conflict, and sometimes in oppression. Examples which come to mind are the violence to which the Jews were sometimes subjected, the wars against the Moors, the Crusades against Islam, the wars of the Teutonic Knights against the Balts and the Slavs, and the struggle against the Turks. It is a very striking fact, however, that no race sentiment entered into any of these struggles. The sense of division was felt not on that plane, but on the spiritual plane of faith, the conflict being between true belief and false beliefs.[1] The Moors were thought of not as "Arabs" but as "infidels".

Within Christendom, there was no racial feeling in the form of chauvinistic nationalism. Nowadays we can more easily recognize the signs of national feeling which made themselves apparent in Europe from Carolingian times onwards, but at the same time we cannot but be impressed by the universality of a Church and a culture through whose influence the University of Paris was able, in the thirteenth century, to boast the Englishman Alexander of Hales, the German Albertus Magnus, and the Italians Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura; through whose influence also "in the twelfth century, the See of Canterbury was occupied by an Italian, St. Anselm; that of Lincoln by a Savoyard, St. Hugh; that of Chartres by an Englishman, John of Salisbury. . . ."[2]

1 Cf. R. F. Benedict, Race and Racism, London, The Labour Book Service, 1943, p. 107.

2 Mgr. Feltin, pastoral letter, 1952.

The results of this universalism, incidentally, were not always entirely good. Roman universality sometimes involved too much uniformity, too much submission, too much neglect of proper national particularities. Several schisms were encouraged by national, sometimes almost racial sentiment, which was too often overlooked; examples are the African schisms of the fourth century Donatists and Circumcellions); later on, Czech national sentiment was to find expression in the movement of the Bohemian Brethren, the claims of the Utraquists (demanding the cup in the Euchrist), and the work of John Hus; in the same way, Luther's reforming movement has the background of German national sentiment in revolt against the exactions of Rome and the contemptuous dominion of the Italians. All this shows that the Church, while affirming and achieving a higher unity, has to take into account the facts of nationhood and, if need be, of race. Truth lies in the harmonizing of the principle of universality with the facts of national life.[1] It is possible that, if a Berber Church had developed in North Africa, Islam would have encountered greater resistance.

The few writers who have traced the history of racist ideas are unanimous in telling us that "racial prejudice came into being in the sixteenth century, during the colonial period ... and even then the phenomenon was not of sudden appearance. It is to be noted that, in the eyes of sixteenth-century men,

1 Cf. Fr. Dvornik, National Churches and the Church Universal, Westminster, 1944.

the spread of Christianity or, in other words, of the dominant form of civilization, ruled out any racial discrimination."[1] "European expansion overseas set the stage for racist dogmas and gave violent early expression to racial antipathies without propounding racism as a philosophy".[2] There seems to be no doubt that racial prejudice is linked, in origin and development, with colonial imperialism. We find eloquent testimony in support of this fact in the development of feeling towards coloured people, and particularly towards Negroes, in England. In the eighteenth century, Negroes were living in England as servants, under a paternalistic system, without arousing any repulsion. It was in the nineteenth century and the twentieth, with the growth of imperialist pride and the development of colonialism, that a feeling of contempt for the Negro grew up in England.[3]

The prejudice typical of colonialism developed in a particularly virulent form among certain Spaniards after the discovery and conquest of America. Solorzano informs us, in his De Indiarum jure, that many of them denied that the Indians were men although they appeared to be so, on the ground that they had no intelligence. Pietro d'Anghiera, Francisco Lopez de Gomara, Pedro de Cieza de Leon, Girolamo Benzoni (a Milanese), Antonio de Herrera, Simon Maiolus, and Father Gregorio Garcia - in spite of the fact that the latter was a colleague of that

1 Ch.-A. Julien, Racism and French Union, in Worlds of the Orient, Nos 9, 10 and 11.
2 R. F. Benedict, op. cit., p. 111.
3 Cf K. L. Little, Negroes in Britain. A Study of Racial Relations in English Society, London, Kegan Paul, 1948.

admirable man, Las Casas - reiterated throughout the sixteenth century a slogan which enabled them to keep the Indians in encomienda, or, in other words, in a state very little removed from that of slavery. It was at this stage that Pope Paul III, informed of the situation by the Dominican, Julio Garcez, Bishop of Tlaxcala, published a searies of Bulls, in May and June 1537, which are probably the first pronouncements of the Roman Magisterium on race questions:

"It has come to our mind that our dear son in Christ, Charles, Emperor of the Romans and King of Castille and Leon, published an edict against those who, inflamed by greed, were showing inhumanity towards humankind, which same edict forbade his subjects to reduce the Idians of the West and the South to slavery or to deprive them of their goods. Considering that the Indians themselves, though still not received into the bosom of the Church, are not, and must not be, deprived of their freedom or their possessions, since they are men, and therefore capable of faith and of salvation, and must not be reduced to slavery but, by preaching and example, exhorted to life . . . (there follows an excommunication, reserved to the Holy See, against any who reduce the Indians to slavery or deprive them of their goods.[1]

1 Bull or Brief Pastorale officium, addressed to Cardinal Juan de Tavera, Archbishop of Toledo, on 29 May 1538.

"The enemy of the human race has suggested to some of his followers the idea of spreading through the world the opinion that the inhabitants of the West Indies and the southern continents, of whose existence we have but recently learnt, should be treated like animals that have not reason, and be employed solely for our profit and our service, on the pretext that they have no part in the Catholic faith and are incapable of adopting it.

"We, the unworthy Vicar of Our Lord, have to do all that lies within our power to preserve the flock committed to Our care, and to bring into safety the lost sheep. We regard the Indians as true men, being not only capable of adopting the Christian faith but desirous of doing so.

"Therefore, in the desire of remedying the ill which has been caused, We decide and declare by this Our letter (whose translation shall be authenticated with his seal by every priest) that the aforesaid Indians, and all other peoples which may, in future, become known to Christendom, shall not be deprived of their freedom and their goods - notwithstanding contrary assertions - even if they be not Christians; but that, on the contrary, they shall be left in the enjoyment of their freedom and their property.

"The Indians and other peoples which may yet be discovered in the future shall be converted only by the Word of God and by the example of a good and holy life."[1]

1 The Bull Sublimis Deus, of 2 June 1537 (some give the date as 9 June). Another Bull, Veritas Ipsa, of the same date, addressed to the Discaiced Friars, set forth the same ideas.

THE CHURCH AND PRESENT-DAY RACISM

Ideas on the subject having thus arrived at some degree of maturity, two major groups of facts distinctive of the nineteenth century brought up the race question in a new and sometimes very acute form, calling for a practical stand by Christian thought. These were: the development of the missionary movement; the colonial conquests which necessarily led to the need for Europeans and natives to live side by side, followed by the anti-slavery movement and all its consequences. Thus we shall see the Church brought face to face, in practice, with (a) the problems arising out of the missionary movement; (b) the questions to which the need for white and coloured people to live side by side has given rise, especially in South Africa and in the United States of America.

THE CHURCH AND THE RACES FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE CHURCH's MISSIONARY WORK

Missionary work can mean only the introduction of converts into the Apostolic Church, and the establishment of the Church of the Apostles in places and among peoples where it has not previously been known, by rendering present and active the three great elements which form the structure of the Church; the faith, the sacraments of faith, and the powers of the ministry (priesthood, episcopacy). Both in distant missions and in countries which have long been converted to Christianity, however, the Church necessarily carries out the secondary mission

of spreading Christian civilization. Facts throughout history show clearly that the Church has never, in the slightest degree, subscribed to the racist tenet that to pursue such an endeavour is sheer folly, since the pagan peoples are doomed by race to be inferior.[1] Wherever the Church has carried the Gospel, it has also carried - in preparation, as a concomitant, or as a natural outcome - education, care for the sick or undernourished body, a higher status for women, a healthier family existence, consideration for children and for human life, work and respect for work, rules of justice, ~~rules of justice,~~ rules to govern peaceful relations, and so forth.

In short, the first characteristics of Catholic missionary work are the practical demonstration of unity and an enormous enrichment of the recipient peoples. The Church is one, the Church has much to give.

But there are other characteristics on the other side of the picture: diversity and enrichment of the Church. The Church has received much from the missions; it draws its strength not only from a heavenly source, the Christ, the Second Adam, full of grace and truth, but also from an earthly source, mankind, which is but the substance - multiplied and distributed throughout all peoples, all civilizations, all languages and all the experience of history - of the First Adam, which is to be "resumed" in the Second.

1 Hitler, Mein Kampf, p. 446.

Obviously, what we are really concerned with here is the people, i.e. a phenomenon belonging to the world of history and culture - not, in the strict sense to that of biology. Racist writers constantly fall into the fallacy of passing from one order to another and of attributing to a more or less mythical entity, which they call race, a variety of features which are really due to historical or local conditions or result from cultural or historical factors. The idea of "race" is not a concept stemming from the Catholic tradition, and has no place in theology, missiology, pastoral theology or canon law. All that the Church can do in this field is to take note, where appropriate, of the conclusions of science. After all, since all spiritual souls are equal, but one individual nevertheless differs from another in intelligence and character by reason of a different balance or a different degree of perfection in his bodily powers, and since those bodily aptitudes are in part inherited and genetically determined, why should not a group of men derived from a common stock at a more or less distant date display a special type of temperament, conditioned by heredity and therefore racial in nature? There is nothing inherently impossible in this; the difficulty is that inter-marriage has taken place almost everywhere on so large a scale that the reality of race is

extremely problematical. There is no doubt that what we should speak of is not "races" but "peoples".

The demands facing "missiology" (which is itself merely a branch of ecclesiology) as a result of the diversity of peoples and civilizations have generally been dealt with under the heading of "adaptation". The idea of adaptation, however, does not go far enough. It implies a somewhat paternalistic condescension which, though praiseworthy enough within its proper limits, cannot embody the full ideal of catholicity. On the other hand, people have come much closer to that ideal when they have talked of the native Church, native clergy, native art or even native theology. The problem is not simply to give the countries to which the Gospel is taken a clergy properly "adapted" to their task, familiar with the local language and customs, the forms of art which will make an appeal, and a good translation of the catechism (an enormous problem in itself!) it is also to inspire and strengthen the vocation in the peoples of India, China and the Cameroons, and likewise an art, a system of thought, an embodiment in culture of apostolic Catholicism, which shall be truly Indian, Chinese or Cameroon, just as our own traditions are American - or English, Slav or Spanish.

The main efforts have been devoted to the key problem - that of the native clergy. From the very beginning of missionary work in distant fields, the Popes urged the need

for a native clergy and native bishops[1] as did the Congregation De propaganda fide.[2] This has become absolutely imperative at the present day, as is shown by the encyclicals Maximum illud of Benedict XV, dated 30 November 1919, Rerum Ecclesiae of Pius XI, dated 18 February 1926, and Evangelii praecones of Pius XII, dated 2 June 1951. This last contains not only very definite statements on the need for a native clergy but also the most explicit pronouncements regarding respect for native civilizations, for the individuality of the different peoples and for all the elements of truth that Christianity may find in them.

It is thus clear that, both in doctrine and in practice, the Church recognizes the facts of "race"; but, so far as the Church is concerned, race is no more a reason for religious discrimination than it is a basis for the imposition of uniformity.

THE CHURCH AND THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN THE COEXISTENCE OF WHITE AND COLOURED PEOPLE

The problem to be solved is how life as members of a common society is to be lived by men of different ethnic

1 Pius V, letter to the King of Portugal, 1571; Urban VII, Bull of 1627.

2 Instructions of 1630, etc.

origins and - more important still - of different and disparate cultural standards. In some countries it is not specially acute. In Brazil, for instance, the practising of any form of racial discrimination by public servants is punishable by law; coloured priests are numerous; and a satisfactory modus vivendi has been reached between Indians, Negroes, and whites of Portugese descent.[1] On the other hand, the question remains a burning one in South Africa, where it is very difficult to solve, and in the United States, where it need not prove so. Only after surveying the position in these two countries will it be possible to grasp the general premises for the Catholic position.

In South Africa 8,500,000 Negroes and 300,000 Indians share the country with 2,500,000 whites and 1,000,000 half-castes. The whites are descended from Dutch colonists, French Huguenot refugees or English settlers; 83 per cent of the land and all political power are in their hands. Of the Negroes, no more than five per cent are able to read and write, although a considerable expenditure of effort and money on schools for them has been made. Draconian legislation enforces complete segregation (Apartheid) and prevents any contact, even physical, between white and coloured people;

1 Cf. the Unesco enquiry of 1952, of which the findings are given in Class and Caste in Rural Brazil (edited by Charles Wagley)

business and industry are run by and for the whites, and the Negroes' part is merely to provide pauper labour, ill-fed, ill-housed and sometimes ill-treated. This state of affairs is the source of social problems, and even scandals and injustices, which books like Alan Paton's novel, Cry the Beloved Country, have brought before the bar of world opinion.

In the United States there are some 15,000,000 Negroes, of whom the majority are the descendants of slaves brought from Africa between 1619 and the Civil War of 1861-65. There are also other non-white minorities - Japanese and Puerto Rican - presenting a problem analogous to that of the Negro minority, smaller indeed, but sometimes even more acute; and lastly an Indian minority which, though confined to the Reserves, is of continuing concern to the Federal Government. Only the Negro problem will be considered here. Enough has been written about it to fill several library shelves; and although the Catholic Church has no more than 350,000 Negro adherents, she has not been able to avoid taking a definite theoretical and practical stand.

So far as principle is concerned, the Church's position is simple. It was enunciated by John Ireland, Archbishop of St. Paul, on 1 January 1891 in a masterly address delivered on the anniversary of the Act of Emancipation of 1863. After extolling the abolition of slavery, Archbishop

Ireland proceeded thus:

"Let us do our full duty. There is work for us. I have said that slavery has been abolished in America; the trail of the serpent, however, yet marks the ground. We do not accord to our black brothers all the rights and privileges of freedom and of a common humanity. They are the victims of an unreasonable and unjustifiable ostracism. They may live, provided they live away from us, as a separate and inferior race, with whom close contact is pollution. It looks as if we had grudgingly granted to them emancipation, as if we fain still would be the masters and hold them in servitude.

What do I claim for the black man? That which I claim for the white man, neither more nor less. I would blot out the colour line. White men have their estrangements. They separate on lines of wealth, of intelligence, of culture, of ancestry. . . . But let there be no barrier against mere colour.

Why a barrier of this kind? Where can we find a reason for it? Colour is the merest accident in man, the result of climatic changes. The colours of the human skin are of many different kinds. The shadings of the so-called white race are not easily numbered. Why visit with the ire of our exclusive pride the black, even into its lightest

shadings, scarcely discernible to the eye from the olive dark, a shading most admired in the white family of nations?

Not in race. Men are all of the same race, sprung from the one father and the one mother. Ethnology and the Holy Writ give the same testimony. The sub-divisions of race are but accidental deviations from the parent stock, which revert to the first model as easily with the same length of years as they diverted from it. The notion that God by special interposition marked off the sub-divisions of the human family, and set upon each one an indelible seal of permanence, is the dream of ignorance or bigotry.

The objection is made that Negroes are of inferior intellectual parts to the whites. I reply, that there are white men inferior on those lines to other white men, and still no wall of separation is built up by the latter against the former. Treat Negroes who are intellectually inferior to us as we treat inferior whites, and I shall not complain. And as to a radical inferiority in the Negro as compared with his white brother, we can afford to deny it in presence of his achievements in the short years which have elapsed since restitution was made to him of his freedom, and any inferiority which exists we may attribute to his unfortunate condition of long centuries whether in America or his native Africa.

We are the victims of foolish prejudice, and the sooner we free ourselves from it the sooner shall we grow into true

manhood. Is it to our honour that we persecute men because of the social conditions of their fathers? It is not so long ago since the proudest peoples of Europe were immersed in barbarism. It is not to our honour that we punish men for the satisfaction of our own pride. Why, the fact that once the Negro was our slave should compel us to treat him with particular liberality, to compensate him if possible for wrong done, and to obliterate in mutual forbearance and favour the sad memories of years gone by.

I would break down all barriers. Let the Negro be our equal before the law. There are states where the violation in the Negro of the most sacred personal rights secured impunity before the law. In many states the law forbids marriage between white and black - in this manner fomenting immorality and putting injury no less upon the white whom it pretends to elevate than upon the black for whose degradation it has no care.

Let the Negro be our equal in the enjoyment of all political rights of the citizen. The Constitution gives him those rights; let us be loyal to the Constitution. If the education of the Negro does not fit him to be a voter and an office holder, let us, for his sake and our own, hurry to enlighten him.

I would open to the Negro all industrial and professional avenues - the test for his advance being his ability, but never his colour. I would, in all public gatherings, and in all public resorts, in halls and hotels, treat the black man as I treat the white. I might shun the vulgar man, whatever his colour, but the gentleman, whatever his colour, I would not dare push away from me.

Shall the homes of the whites be opened to the blacks, shall all meet in the parlour in perfect social equality? My answer is that one's home is one's castle, the privileged place where one follows out his own likes and his own tastes, and no one, white or black, rich or poor, can pass the door without an invitation from the owner, and no one can pass censure upon the owner's act."

In this splendid text we already find the practical side dealt with in considerable detail; it lays down clear-cut directives. However, in all practical matters there are, between the prescribing of the objectives or directives and the immediate act, certain stages to be traversed, obstacles to be overcome, "psychological moments" to be awaited, and practical limitations to be endured - to say nothing of the resistance put up by selfishness, pride, timidity and worldliness, and the regrettable inertia to which every social entity is liable. "The spirit is willing,but the flesh is weak. . . ."

It is a fact that it is difficult to secure a Negro's admission to hospital; in Pennsylvania for instance, in 1951, only two per cent of beds were allocated to Negroes, though the latter represent 11 per cent of the population. In some states, such as California, the law approves no discrimination, and it often happens that white people are treated by a Negro doctor or dentist. Elsewhere, as in Mississippi and South Carolina, the whites avoid the Negroes to the utmost possible extent. Historical-social complexes are the most enduring of all, and cannot be abolished in a single century; we have only to recall the cases of the Protestants in France and the Catholics in England. The Negroes too have their complexes, which affect the practical terms of the problem; and corresponding complexes are found in the whites, nd more particularly - formless but powerful - in white women, among whom an animal fear of the Negro as a potential aggressor is often to be noted. In America the two races share a country, but there is almost no meeting of minds, and as little physical meeting as possible. After the Emancipation, the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore (1866) considered the question whether separate churches should be built for Negroes or whether they should be accepted in the same churches as other believers.

It finally left it to each bishop to decide on the alternative which he considered the most salutary.[1] In practice, there are very few mixed parishes. The reason is primarily the absence of mixed residential areas; the Negroes have their own districts, and on occasion they come together spontaneously on a basis of origin. However, there are also reasons less comfortable to admit, having their root in colour prejudice pure and simple;and for a true Christian it is more than mildly shocking to see the faithful divide, according to colour, for the united act of the Eucharist or for a diocesan congress.[2]

For years there was a lack of coloured clergy, even for the needs of the Negroes; only 14 Negro priests were ordained between 1854 and 1934, while as late as 1950 the total number in service was only 33. Today, however, the number of those being called is substantial, and it is anticipated that there will be many more. The Holy See is naturally encouraging this trend, and in this connection we may quote the following lines from the Encyclical Sertum Laetitiae addressed to the Episcopate of the United States by Pius XII on 1 November 1939:

1 Article 10, Fourth Degree

2 Cf. the investigation by Father J. H. Fichter, S. J., Southern Parish, Vol. I, University of Chicago Press, 1952.

"We confess that We feel a special paternal affection, which is certainly inspired of Heaven, for the Negro people dwelling among you; for in the field of religion and education, We know that they need special care and comfort and are very deserving of it. . . ."[1]

Thus American Catholics still have far to travel in a sphere in which our honour as Christians, far more even than our honour as democrats, is involved. The Catholic Inter-Racial Council, an association directed by Father La Farge, S. J., publishes a monthly organ entitled Inter-Racial Review, A Journal for Christian Democracy.[2] This takes its stand on the concept of the absolute unity of the Mystical Body and of liturgical worship. It should be added that the clergy are unanimous in sharing these views, while the theological writings available to them are also entirely explicit. Father J. E. Coogon, S. J., writes that discrimination against Negroes in schools and churches is condemned by theologians as "unjust, impious and scandalous".[3] A moralist, J. F. Doherty, writes that there may perhaps be grounds for taking racial differences into

1 Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 1939, p. 637; English text, p. 647
2 20 Versey Street, New York
3 "Christian Untouchables?" in Review for Religious, No. 5, 1946, pp. 107-13.

account in the case of a proposed marriage. If, however, after due consideration, a person wishes to marry someone of a different race, no law can justly forbid it, and any law doing so would be an unjust law, not binding, therefore, upon the conscience.[1]

One conclusion is to be drawn from the Church's attitude towards the two great concrete problems which we have just reviewed. In every case we have seen that the Church rejects the principles of racism in their entirety but does give weight to the facts of race and to the concrete historical circumstances in which racial problems are moving towards a valid solution. The Church thus combines healthy realism and untainted idealism. But its realism is informed throughout by its ideals, and its idealism is realistic. The two are like two facets of the same truth and here, as everywhere, the truth makes men free.

The Church is not racist, indeed she is the antithesis of racism; she stands for the unity of the human family, yet for a unity which does not exclude diversities but rather comprehends them, because it is "catholic". However, the Church recognizes that in the temporal sphere the coexistence of different human groups within a single society does present difficult problems, not because of any radical inequality per se between the races which such groups actually or allegedly

1 Moral Problems of Inter-Racial Marriages, Washington, 1950.

represent, but because the groups as constituted are at different cultural and political and hence at different "human" levels - for this adjective is not merely a biological description, but has positive cultural connotations.

It is essential to be absolutely clear on this point. The inequalities are real human inequalities; but they have nothing to do with any hereditary or genetically inevitable inferiority. They spring from the chances of history and sometimes of geography. What time causes time can also change. The Norwegians were a backward people when Byzantium represented the greatest civilization of the world; at various points in history the Egyptians were the teachers of Greece, and the Arabs of the West; and the Chinese, before their culture became static and thus acted as a brake on them, were several centuries ahead of Europe. It may be that the future belongs to peoples who today are outside the main stream of history. Let us then by all means talk of factual inequalities of a cultural, social or political nature, but not of essential inequalities dependent on genetic factors.

From this flow consequences of the utmost importance. Firstly, inequalities in development do not involve any essential inequalities. Secondly, essential equality does

not necessarily imply actual equality in every respect in the sphere of cultural, social and political life. The overriding principle of human unity must indeed invariably be deferred to, but it does not do away with cultural gradations. All men are equal in essence, and this is reflected in their equality in natural primary rights, those comprehended in the term "dignity of the human person". But there are men who cannot read or do not wash, and others who do wash and who do read. The latter are under no obligation to associate with the former for all purposes at all costs; they are however bound, by the brotherly duty created by the unity of the human family, to help them to educate themselves, and to learn to read and wash.

Such, we think, are the general ideas determining the Church's attitude in practice. The Church herself sets human societies an example of good faith. She proclaims and applies the principle of the unity and equality of all men. She helps forward the less advanced, and even commits authority to them as soon as they are in a position to assume it. The Church is unity; but within that unity there is an extraordinary diversity, and to that diversity, which includes the diversity of races (in so far as there are races), she gives a positive and sanctified meaning.

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